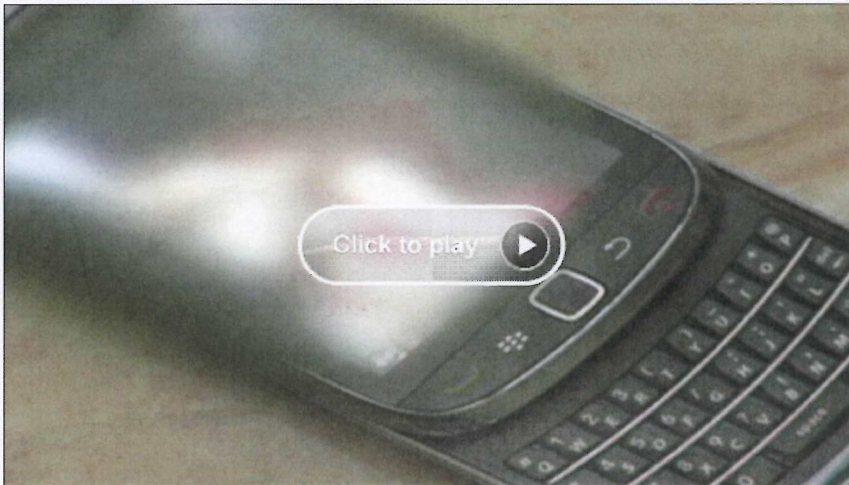


Libyan rebels say captured cell phone videos show rape, torture

By Sara Sidner, CNN

June 17, 2011 8:17 a.m. EDT

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Libyan rebels: Proof of rape on phones

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- CNN sees a video showing a woman being abused by two men
- CNN cannot confirm when or where the video was shot
- Rebels and experts claim pro-Gadhafi forces are raping and torturing
- The stigma of the brutality has reportedly led a rebel commander to erase evidence

Misrata, Libya (CNN) -- On the front lines of Libya's war, rebel fighters say they are finding more than weapons on captured or killed soldiers loyal to ruler Moammar Gadhafi.

Rebels say they have confiscated cell phones that contain video showing Gadhafi loyalists raping women and torturing people.

CNN has obtained a copy of a video shot on a cell phone that appears to show a woman being sexually abused. The person who gave the video to CNN says it was on a cell phone that was confiscated from a Gadhafi loyalist.

It shows two men in civilian clothes standing over a naked woman who is bent over with her face on the floor.

The man standing behind her is sodomizing her with what appears to be a broomstick. "I can't bear it! I can't bear it!" the woman cries.

"Let's push it farther," a male voice says off-camera.

"No, no, that's enough!" the woman begs.

Eventually, one of the men puts his sock-covered foot on her face. In Arab culture, that is considered a major insult. But in this case, it pales in comparison to what the victim is already enduring.

Arabic speakers who listened to the video at CNN's request say the voices have Tripoli accents. There is no date on the video and the men in it are not wearing military uniforms.

CNN has been unable to verify the video's authenticity, when it was shot, or by whom. The person who gave it to CNN asked not to be identified for fear of being punished by Libya's conservative society.

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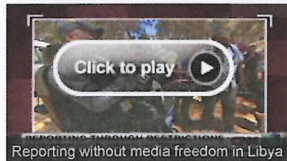
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The Gadhafi government did not respond to CNN requests for comment on the allegations of abuse.

But officials have said in response to similar accusations in the past that the government has not been able to verify the claims and would "welcome" a fact-finding mission.

We were able to confirm that rape was used as a weapon of war because it was systematic.

--Rebel spokesman Abdullah al-Kabeir



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An opposition spokesman says the video illustrates a pattern of abuse.

"We were able to confirm that rape was used as a weapon of war, because it was systematic," rebel spokesman Abdullah al-Kabeir said.

The rebels have many videos showing other types of torture, and a few depict rape, he said. He did not know exactly how many videos there were showing abuse.

One of the most famous faces of Libya's revolution, Eman al-Obeidi, dramatically claimed in March she had been gang-raped by pro-Gadhafi forces. She has since fled the country.

A Libyan psychologist who has conducted an investigation of her own says al-Obeidi's case is not unique.

Siham Sergewa says she has evidence of hundreds of cases of rape by pro-Gadhafi troops.

She began her investigation after receiving phone calls from women who said they had been sexually assaulted. Her survey of 50,000 people in refugee camps turned up 259 people who said they had been raped, she said last month.

"They tie up my husband, they rape me in front of my husband and then they kill my husband," Sergewa said one woman told her.

"I'm a psychologist and I've seen lots of things, really. But sometimes after I leave some of these families I just sit in my car and cry because it's really so painful," she said.

She has compiled a number of distressing images that she says demonstrate the abuse of alleged victims. One appears to show a cigarette burn on a woman's breast, another a faded bite mark, while several others show the deep purple hue of nasty bruises.

Sergewa shared her research, complete with pictures and recordings, with the International Criminal Court at The Hague, Netherlands, where prosecutors are investigating accusations that the Gadhafi regime has used rape as a tool of war.

"The victims are starting to come out," the court's chief prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, told CNN Thursday. "But in our court the crimes are massive and the crimes we are charging Gadhafi with are crimes against humanity, meaning a widespread and systematic attack -- in this case through rapes -- so we don't need to prove one case; we need to prove massive numbers of cases.

"In this case, the evidence can be different. It could be soldiers who were given instructions on how to do it. The evidence could be doctors or psychologists who have spoken to the victims. That's the kind of evidence we are collecting."

The court is still in the evidence-collecting stage, he said. For the video to be part of that evidence, its authenticity would have to be certified, he said. "These are interesting pieces, but it isn't the only way to put forward the case. For instance, we have some information of people saying that Gadhafi himself was giving instructions. So if we can confirm this evidence, that will be enough to present this type

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of case as a crime against humanity -- as a widespread campaign of rapes."

Moreno-Ocampo said he was hoping the judge would soon issue an arrest warrant for Gadhafi. "And then the challenge will be to arrest him, because arresting him will be the end to these crimes," he said.

Rebel spokesman al-Kabeir, however, said some of the evidence of war crimes that prosecutors want to present in court has been destroyed by a rebel leader.

"There was a commander here at the eastern front in Misrata named Mohamed al-Halboos; he ordered all the (rebel) fighters to give him all the rape videos they find on Gadhafi soldiers' cell phones. I heard that he used to destroy every rape video he got," al-Kabeir said.

Asked why potential evidence of war crimes being carried out by pro-Gadhafi forces would be destroyed by rebel forces, he cited the heavy stigma that Libyan culture attaches to the victims of such crimes.

"Aside from being a heinous crime, rape is perceived here in our culture as damaging not only for the girl, but also the whole family," he said.

In fact, he added, rape is such a taboo here that some victims' families would rather erase potential evidence than risk living with the shame.

In Washington, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the United States was "deeply concerned" over the reports of wide-scale rape in Libya.

"A thorough investigation of this matter is needed to bring perpetrators to justice," she said in a statement.

"Gadhafi's security forces and other groups in the region are trying to divide the people by using violence against women and rape as tools of war, and the United States condemns this in the strongest possible terms."

CNN's Amir Ahmed contributed to this story.

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